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IPHCA, Legislative Champions Make Push for Increased Funding at Illinois Capitol Advocacy Day

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., April 19, 2023 – As Illinois makes mental health and substance abuse care a top priority, leaders of community health centers, also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and their legislative champions made a direct, powerful case at the state Capitol for increased funding to treat thousands more facing health challenges in underserved communities.

The Illinois Primary Health Care Association (IPHCA) represents 53 FQHCs serving more than 1.5 million patients across Illinois at more than 400 sites. Today, IPHCA and three of its members joined with State Representative Anna Moeller for a Statehouse news conference to advocate for increased funding to address inadequate community health center payment rates in Illinois, especially the severely insufficient behavioral health rates.

Rep. Moeller explained that her sponsorship of legislation (Senate Bill 1888 and House Bill 2298) would increase historically low reimbursement rates for meeting patients' medical, dental, and behavioral health needs under the Medicaid program – where Illinois' rates trail neighboring states by about 80 percent.

It is estimated that with the increase, FQHCs will be able to:

- Care for an additional 180,000 patients each year;
- Hire 250 more health care providers; and
- Provide new, or additional, services including substance use treatment, dental care, transportation, vision care, and more.

Half of the \$100 million estimated cost would be shared with the federal government.

Leaders of community health centers explained the need for stronger public investment to support additional services and programs when they came to Springfield Wednesday to meet with legislators on their annual advocacy day. Workforce challenges have proven numerous for many years, only exacerbated by burnout, early retirement, and turnover prompted by the public health emergency. Low Medicaid reimbursement rates limit Illinois health centers' ability to compete for staff with not only healthcare systems that can offer richer compensation and benefits packages, but also neighboring states.

They also discussed Senate Bill 1816 and House Bill 3049, legislation pushed by Sen. Ann Gillespie and Rep. Theresa Mah this session, that would add graduate-level, subclinical behavioral health professionals practicing under licensed clinicians to the list of providers whose services can be reimbursed for care. That would expand services to an estimated 72,000 new patients through 175 new providers.

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Participants expect these two initiatives to be considered as part of state budget negotiations leading up to the scheduled May 19 adjournment of the spring legislative session.

“It is imperative that we make proper investments in healthcare to ensure equity in our system,” said Ollie Idowu, President + CEO of the Illinois Primary Health Care Association. “We appreciate the strong support of our sponsoring legislators to show that reasonable, long-overdue investments in the care we provide at community health centers will pay huge dividends for underserved communities throughout Illinois. We believe now is the right time to make this investment.”

“So many people in our neighborhoods have gone too long without proper access to health care, without dental care, without mental health treatment,” said State Sen. Robert Peters, D-Chicago, who was unable to attend due to a last-minute commitment. “With our state’s strong financial position, we must take a step forward to help people served by community health centers and join our neighboring states to better use federal money to promote better physical and mental health care.”

“Even through a historic pandemic, Illinois has made great strides in improving access to and quality of healthcare,” Moeller said. “Expanding our funding to federally funded community health centers is a critical way we can raise patient health standards and support our health care heroes and the great work they do. Tackling the inequities in our health system has been a top priority as state representative, and I am proud to join my colleagues in both chambers to overcome this pervasive issue with our legislation.”

About the Illinois Primary Health Care Association (IPHCA)

IPHCA is a nonprofit trade association that serves as the voice of and champion for all 53 Illinois community health centers which serve more than 1.5 million patients annually across more than 400 service sites in medically underserved areas in our state’s rural, urban, and suburban communities.

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